

CLAIMS

1. A process for fabricating a diffusion media, said process comprising:

5 providing a diffusion media substrate comprising a porous fibrous matrix defining first and second major faces, wherein said substrate comprises an amount of carbonaceous material sufficient to render said substrate electrically conductive;

10 applying a mesoporous layer along at least a portion of one of said first and second major faces of said substrate, wherein

15 said mesoporous layer is applied to said substrate by providing a coating comprising a hydrophobic component, a hydrophilic component, and a pore forming agent, and

20 said substrate is free of fluorinated polymers outside of regions of said substrate carrying said mesoporous layer; and

25 decomposing said pore forming agent such that said mesoporous layer is characterized by a porosity greater than a porosity of said diffusion media substrate.

2. A process as claimed in claim 1 wherein said hydrophobic component comprises a fluorinated polymer.

30 3. A process as claimed in claim 2 wherein said hydrophobic component comprises PTFE.

4. A process as claimed in claim 1 wherein said coating is provided as a mixture comprising between about 15 wt% and about 40 wt% of said hydrophobic component.

25 5. A process as claimed in claim 1 wherein said coating is provided as a mixture comprising about 20 wt% of said hydrophobic component.

6. A process as claimed in claim 1 wherein said hydrophilic component comprises a carbonaceous substance.

7. A process as claimed in claim 6 wherein said carbonaceous substance is selected from carbon fibers, carbon particles, and combinations thereof.

5 8. A process as claimed in claim 6 wherein said carbonaceous substance is characterized by a surface area of between about 50 cm²/g and about 250 cm²/g.

9. A process as claimed in claim 6 wherein said carbonaceous substance is characterized by a surface area of about 60 cm²/g.

10 10. A process as claimed in claim 6 wherein said carbonaceous substance comprises acetylene black.

11. A process as claimed in claim 1 wherein said coating is provided as a mixture comprising between about 60 wt% and about 85 wt% of said hydrophilic component.

15 12. A process as claimed in claim 1 wherein said coating is provided as a mixture comprising about 80 wt% of said hydrophilic component.

20 13. A process as claimed in claim 1 wherein said pore forming agent comprises a material selected such that said mesoporous layer is substantially free of components of said pore forming agent upon decomposition of said pore forming agent.

25 14. A process as claimed in claim 1 wherein said pore forming agent comprises a material selected to decompose in a mixture with said hydrophobic and hydrophilic components upon heating above room temperature.

15. A process as claimed in claim 14 wherein said pore forming agent comprises a material selected such that said decomposition is particulate free.

16. A process as claimed in claim 14 wherein said pore forming agent comprises a material selected such that said decomposition comprises gaseous and liquid components.

17. A process as claimed in claim 14 wherein said pore forming agent comprises a material selected such that said decomposition comprises at least one gaseous component and H₂O.

18. A process as claimed in claim 1 wherein said pore forming agent comprises ammonium carbonate.

10 19. A process as claimed in claim 1 wherein said coating is provided as a mixture comprising between about 0 wt% and about 15 wt% of said pore forming agent.

20. A process as claimed in claim 1 wherein said coating is provided as a mixture comprising about 5 wt% of said pore forming agent.

15 21. A process as claimed in claim 1 wherein a sufficient amount of said mesoporous layer is applied to said substrate to substantially increase a porosity of said diffusion media relative to said diffusion media absent said mesoporous layer.

20 22. A process as claimed in claim 21 wherein said substantial increase in said porosity of said diffusion media is between about 5% and about 15%.

23. A process as claimed in claim 21 wherein said substantial increase in said porosity of said diffusion media is about 7.5%.

25 24. A process as claimed in claim 21 wherein said porosity of said diffusion media including said substrate and said mesoporous layer is about 84%.

30 25. A process as claimed in claim 1 wherein said coating further comprises a solvent selected from H₂O, isopropanol, and combinations thereof.

26. A process as claimed in claim 1 wherein said coating is provided such that it at least partially infiltrates said diffusion media substrate.

5 27. A process as claimed in claim 1 wherein a sufficient amount of said mesoporous layer is applied to said substrate to substantially increase an overall porosity of said diffusion media from about 78% absent said mesoporous layer to about 84% including said mesoporous layer.

10 28. A process as claimed in claim 1 wherein a sufficient amount of said mesoporous layer is applied to said substrate to yield a mesoporous layer thickness of between about 10 μ m and about 25 μ m.

29. A process as claimed in claim 28 wherein said diffusion media substrate is provided having a thickness of between about 100 μ m and about 300 μ m.

15 30. A process as claimed in claim 1 wherein said pore forming agent is decomposed by a heat treating process.

20 31. A process as claimed in claim 30 wherein said heat treating process is characterized by temperatures between about 75°C and about 100°C.

32. A process as claimed in claim 30 wherein said heat treating process is characterized by temperatures above about 65°C.

25 33. A process for fabricating a diffusion media, said process comprising:
providing a diffusion media substrate comprising a porous fibrous matrix defining first and second major faces, wherein said substrate comprises an amount of carbonaceous material sufficient to render said substrate electrically conductive;
30 applying a mesoporous layer along at least a portion of one of said first and second major faces of said substrate, wherein

5 said mesoporous layer is applied to said substrate by providing a coating comprising a hydrophobic component, a hydrophilic component, a pore forming agent, and a solvent,

 said hydrophobic component comprises a fluorinated polymer,

10 said hydrophilic component comprises a carbonaceous substance selected from carbon fibers, carbon particles, and combinations thereof,

 said carbonaceous substance is characterized by a surface area of about 60 cm²/g,

 said pore forming agent comprises ammonium carbonate,

15 said substrate is free of fluorinated polymers outside of regions of said substrate carrying said mesoporous layer,

 a sufficient amount of said mesoporous layer is applied to said substrate to substantially increase a porosity of said diffusion media relative to said diffusion media absent said mesoporous layer,

20 said substantial increase in said porosity of said diffusion media is between about 5% and about 15%,

 said solvent is selected from H₂O, isopropanol, and combinations thereof, and

 said coating is provided such that it at least partially infiltrates said diffusion media substrate; and

25 decomposing said pore forming agent in a heat treating process such that said mesoporous layer is characterized by a porosity greater than a porosity of said diffusion media substrate.

34. A device comprising a diffusion media wherein:

 said diffusion media comprises a diffusion media substrate and a mesoporous layer;

 said diffusion media substrate comprises a porous fibrous matrix defining first and second major faces and an amount of carbonaceous material sufficient to render said substrate electrically conductive;

said diffusion media substrate carries said mesoporous layer along at least a portion of one of said first and second major faces of said substrate;

 said mesoporous layer comprises hydrophobic and hydrophilic components defining hydrophobic and hydrophilic regions within said mesoporous layer;

5 said mesoporous layer comprises an amount of carbonaceous material sufficient to render said mesoporous layer electrically conductive;

 said mesoporous layer is characterized by a porosity greater than a porosity of said diffusion media substrate; and

10 said diffusion media substrate is free of fluorinated polymers outside of regions of said substrate carrying said mesoporous layer.

35. A device as claimed in claim 34 wherein said mesoporous layer is characterized by pore sizes between about 1nm and 1 μ m.

15 36. A device as claimed in claim 34 wherein:

 said hydrophobic component comprises a fluorinated polymer;

 said hydrophilic component comprises a carbonaceous substance selected from carbon fibers, carbon particles, and combinations thereof;

 said carbonaceous substance is characterized by a surface area of about 60 cm²/g;

20 said mesoporous layer at least partially infiltrates said diffusion media substrate;

 said diffusion media substrate is characterized by a porosity of about 78% outside regions of said substrate carrying said mesoporous layer; and

 said diffusion media is characterized by an overall porosity of about 84%.

25 37. A device as claimed in claim 34 wherein said device further comprises structure defining a fuel cell employing said diffusion media.

38. A device as claimed in claim 37 wherein said device further comprises structure defining a vehicle powered by said fuel cell.